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ABSTRACT

Today, more than ever, non-traditional college students are seeking power over their lives through education. However, unwilling to spend time learning how to find required information, non-traditional students often gather and process only limited amounts of information, thus isolating themselves from the power they seek and sealing their fate as the "information poor." Although academic libraries have undertaken special instructional initiatives in an effort to reach these students, traditional, point-of-need, non-credit and credit courses have inherent limitations. It is time to design a new library instruction based on the establishment of "fitness levels" of library skills competency that would be taught and reinforced across the curriculum, and to redefine the relationship between library and classroom faculty so that the librarian is admitted more directly as a partner in the instructional design of research assignments. The most essential component in such a program would be the development of the fitness level of library skills for non-traditional students, who require instruction defined in terms of intellectual access to the collection as well as in terms of teaching the basic logic of library use and research strategy. The result of such an information skills curriculum would be a more independent, more academically capable student. (KM)

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THE ACADEMIC LIBRARY AND THE NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT

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THE ACADEMIC LIBRARY AND THE NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT

"I told the Englishman that my alma mater was books, a good library." Thus, Malcolm X, one of the most influential non-traditional students of our times, provided the secret of his "homemade education" -- a relentless course of self-study begun in the library of the Norfolk (Massachussetts) Prison Colony as a young adult, and avidly pursued until his death. Unconcerned with whether social status may be conferred along with a formal degree, Malcolm X defined his freedom through the exercise of his rights to read and acquire information, and the right to proclaim what he had learned. A fiercely dedicated adult independent learner, Malcolm X designed his own curriculum using a prison library collection which was uneven in coverage and scope and administered by prison authorities who were clearly not in the business of assisting adult learners. Without the benefit of a traditional college experience, he intuitively recognized the paramount importance of that library in his life, and made it his primary instructional resource.

In some ways, Malcolm X was a precursor of the non-traditional college student of today. Older than the typical college freshman, poor, academically unprepared for college level work, a member of a minority group, he was a man whose life experience brought him to the realization that he needed new skills and new knowledge in order to pursue his goals. Although the circumstances in which the imprisoned Malcolm X embarked upon his education differ vastly from the learning environments

experienced by non-traditional college students, today's student, like Malcolm X, must contend with the presence of libraries in his life, and must establish a working relationship with libraries and the information which they contain in order to survive.

Using Malcolm X's intimate relationship with libraries as a yardstick against which to measure success, what can be said about the relationship between academic libraries and today's non-traditional students?

NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS/NON-TRADITIONAL LIBRARY USERS

Malcolm X is by no means the only precursor of the culturally and ethnically diverse group of individuals known as non-traditional or "new students" who have enrolled in American colleges and universities as the result of the sweeping social changes of the 1960's. There are many examples of today's non-traditional college student in the popular consciousness. One of the most entertaining early indicators of these so called "new students" can be found in a 1948 George Seaton film entitled "An Apartment for Peggy." In the film, William Holden is a World War II veteran attending college full-time under the provisions of the G.I. Bill, and Jeanne Crain is his intelligent, wise, and somewhat off-beat wife. As the plot unfolds, we learn that Holden and his fellow students, having been accustomed to making command decisions that affected the lives of other men, are

finding it difficult to adjust to student life; while their wives, war-time single parents and members of the work force, both fear and resent being left behind in peacetime by their college educated husbands. While the men struggle with traditional courses, a special non-credit lecture series is designed for the wives as a means of "catching up" with their husbands, and, as a result of the dedication and eager class participation of the women, at least one senior faculty member is rescued from an extreme case of faculty burnout. In essence, these characters were the prototypes of the non-traditional college student of today -- mature, goal-oriented, and highly motivated. At the heart of their struggles was the need to gain power or control over their interrupted lives, and education was their chosen path to power.

In the decades that have intervened between the classroom of that 1948 movie set and the very real college classrooms of the late 1980's, non-traditional students have changed considerably -- in terms of socioeconomic status; country of origin, race and ethnicity; dominant language, and competency in the basic skills of mathematics, reading, writing and speaking English -- but their dreams have remained unchanged. Today, more than ever, they seek power over their lives through education, and today, more than ever, they are conducting delicately balanced lives as husbands and wives, wage earners, parents (often single parents) and college students.

Within the cohort of today's non-traditional college

students, women predominate (e.g., at the City University of New York which is largely composed of non-traditional students, 64% of the student enrollment is female), although individuals of both sexes represent various age, racial and ethnic groups. The characteristics which define the non-traditional student population include the following combination of facts and attitudes:

--academically, they are at high risk in the traditional college classroom due to insufficient preparation at lower levels of the educational system;

--economically, they are struggling for survival and require financial assistance in order to undertake college study;

--socially, they are predominantly members of minority groups and first generation college students. In urban centers, they are also likely to be first generation Americans as well. As first time college students, they share the expectation that the college experience will provide them with a means to occupational success;

--experientially, they are likely to be older and more accustomed to bearing the wage-earning, child-rearing, and other responsibilities of a mature adult, and

--attitudinally, they are less likely to take college for granted, skeptical of authority,

interested in exerting some "ownership" rights over their own education, and highly motivated.

It has been observed that non-traditional college students pay for their success with their struggles. Having passed the first point of access -- i.e., college admission -- they constantly re-qualify for their place in college through a complex interplay of academic standards, financial concerns and personal responsiblities.

Along the way, among the many obstacles these non-traditional college students encounter is the academic library. Expected to condense so much learning into a very short timeframe, many non-traditional students seem to miss the connection between libraries and learning that Malcolm X perceived as the source of his freedom. Whereas traditional college students have experienced the library as the centerpiece of their curriculum as much as the architectural center of their campus, the typical non-traditional student seems to approach the academic library as if it were a dangerous pit of intellectual quicksand. Viewed from the vantage point of the reference desk, these seekers of power are intimidated by the power center. There can be no doubt that the library-related behavior of these students is a function of their previous library history. Perhaps there were only small reading collections, or no libraries at all in their earlier experience; perhaps the

libraries which they used collected only materials that validated the existence of a prevailing political philosophy; perhaps their experience of learning has been limited to unquestioned acceptance of the information imparted by a single textbook, or a single teacher. Whatever the reasons, unschooled in the logic of library organization yet cognizant of their dependence on the library for success, non-traditional students come to the academic library and play a dangerous survival game in which time is the critical factor.

In their lives, time is one of their most precious commodities, and they are impatient and frustrated to learn that the library reference desk is not a MacDonald's service counter where quick stops yield fast information in neat, take-out containers. Unwilling to waste time learning how to find required information because every second must be spent mastering the subject at hand, non-traditional college students will frequently reject what appears to be time-consuming and arcane research methodology in favor of clutching a few comfortable sources which can be located by fast-paced browsing. It seems that they will settle for anything as long as they escape without being ensnared by learning a complicated new research process which will interfere with their primary studies.

For example, it is a rare hour at the reference desk in a community college library in which a student assigned to read three recent periodical articles on a "Fortune 500" company (or a similar topic) does not elect the security of literally paging

through the last year's issues of Business Week over the complication of learning how to use the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature in combination with the library's unique list of periodical holdings. In their system of logic, it is faster and easier to go to the magazine itself where the information will eventually turn up than it is to deal with the unknown time factor of learning how to use an intermediate reference tool. For the student trapped in such a faulty definition of library-related time management, information is important only in so far as it is quantifiable and portable. Asked to find a book or three articles, the non-traditional student stops as soon as the magic quota is reached, without regard for the quality or authority of the works he has found.

Thus content to limit their knowledge base, non-traditional students gather and process only limited amounts of information and isolate themselves from the power they seek. The bitter irony of their success in the library survival game, as they have invented it, is the fact that these dedicated power seekers are ill prepared to function in the intensely competitive arena of the information marketplace where they eventually hope to establish successful careers. By functioning at the lowest possible load limit for the handling of information, they seal their fate as the "information poor" in a society dominated by the information rich.

Faced with this dramatic shift in their constituent user population, how have academic libraries responded? What intervention strategies have been attempted? What new patterns or instructional designs might be considered for non-traditional library users?

At the outset, it must be acknowledged that the influx of "new students" is not the only variable which has affected academic libraries in recent years. Over the past three decades, the library world has been buffeted by gale force winds of change. In the face of these challenges, the boundaries of the field have been extended, and new frontiers of activity have been opened. No segment of library service has remained static; automation has changed the ways in which libraries are managed, the ways in which they organize their collections and make them intellectually accessible, and, indeed, the ways in which information itself is stored. Thus, the entire library world has been plunged into a frenzy of activity as the impetus for change has been continually accommodated, and change after major change has been assimilated into the business of delivering library services.

Unaccompanied by the growing numbers of non-traditional students who now populate our college classrooms, these sweeping innovations in library service would have been sufficient cause for academic libraries to launch a massive library user

education program. In combination, these two factors constituted compelling reason for the re-definition of the teaching responsibilities of academic libraries nationwide.

Traditionally, the teaching function of the academic library has been carried out at the reference desk in the classic library learning situation known as the reference interview. Each reference interview unfolds in a time-tested pattern -- i.e., the librarian works with the student to ascertain the nature of his information need, instructs the student in the preparation of a viable search strategy, and introduces the student to new, specialized sources which (hopefully) satisfy the stated information need. In the process, it is expected that the student will also acquire secondary learning as he is exposed to the pattern of logic which guides the development of the subject being researched, and is indoctrinated into some of the subtleties of scholarly communication in that field.

While the depth and breadth of the library's collection and the expertise of the reference librarian are important elements of the reference scenario, it is the student who initiates the action and dominates the drama. Thus, to a great degree, the success of the reference interview is dependent upon the skills and attitudes of the student -- i.e., the student who is articulate, at ease in the library environment, and self-confident enough to approach a librarian to ask questions, reveal needs, listen and follow directions is more likely to benefit from the reference encounter. The non-traditional student -- the

hit and run library user previously described -- typically possesses very few of these prerequisites for success in the library research game as played by the traditional rules of reference. By re-inventing the research game, defining the librarian as enemy rather than ally, and waging a campaign of blitzkreig attacks on the academic library, the non-traditional student has tossed the gauntlet of challenge onto the reference desk. In response to such desperate action, academic libraries have hastened to undertake special instructional initiatives which reach beyond the physical limits of the reference desk and, indeed, beyond the walls of the library itself.

The most radical revision of the architecture of the academic library's instructional activities has emerged from the community colleges (where the impact of non-traditional students has been felt for the greatest length of time), and, specifically, on community college campuses where firm organizational links have been established between the library's traditional printed resources and non-print instructional support services. In the process of building collections to support the basic skills curricula of their developmental studies programs, and in embracing new instructional technologies (such as videotaping and computer-assisted instruction techniques), these community college libraries became not only depositories of published information, but also creators and providers of information through the activities of their new and sophisticated production units. Having undertaken the production effort, it

became a logical extenstion to incorporate individualized learning services and, in some cases, the operation of full scale tutorial services under the auspices of the library. Through this enlightened extension of the library's influence into the design and delivery of instruction, and through the symbolic designation of these community college libraries as LEARNING RESOURCES CENTERS, the stage was set for other academic libraries to follow.

Inspired by the developments within the community college sector, other types of academic libraries began to design bibliographic instruction programs targeted to their non-traditional students. In formulating these new instructional models, academic libraries have defined the reference interview as the basic unit of their instructional program, and have predicated most of their instuctional development activities on the "point of need" teaching philosophy which underlies the reference interview -- i.e., the conviction that the best time to teach the student library research skills is the moment at which the student absolutely must use the library in order to complete a required assignment of sizeable proportions such as a research paper.

While there are many excellent examples of credit-bearing library instruction courses offered under the auspices of the academic library as a teaching department, the typical library instruction program has evolved into a highly developed series of non-credit activities which involve the library in some form of

partnership with faculty from other disciplines. Within the context of these partnerships, the libary assumes an active instructional role at the point in the semester when the students are initiating their research projects -- the point of need. These instruction sessions are tightly organized, and arranged in the same format as the reference interview -- identification of information need, formulation of initial search strategy, and instruction in the use of particular library tools (generally the library's catalog, one or more periodical indexes, and a selection of specialized reference materials). Utilizing the best pedagogical techniques of remedial instruction, the concept of learning reinforcement is prominently featured in the design of the library instruction session -- specially tailored printed guides to research on the assigned topic are distributed as reinforcements of the students' note-taking activities, specially produced video-tapes and computer-assisted instruction materials are used as primary modes of instruction or assigned as review materials, and special efforts are made (generally via follow-up class sessions in the library) to link the classroom-based library instruction activity with the actual practice of newly acquired research skills in the academic library.

Thus, the academic libraries have pursued their retreating non-traditional students and waged an aggressive counter-attack against their fears and trepidations on a battleground where students are more confident of their footing -- the classroom. While this bold frontal attack has sparked the creative energy of

the library faculty to produce many excellent instructional materials, and has achieved the desirable result of enabling more non-traditional students to approach the library, several inherent problems remain to be addressed.

Non-credit, "point of need" library instruction programs are essentially reactive enterprises which rely on forces outside of the library (i.e., other academic departments) to create the pressure points that drive reluctant students to the library instruction session, and, subsequently, to the reference desk. In this configuration, the library is literally teaching on borrowed time, and surrendering its instructional prerogatives in the realm of teaching the complexities of information retrieval to colleagues whose instructional priorities are directed at mastery of content. Furthermore, there is the inherent danger that the use of such pressure tactics will turn the fearful non-traditional student entirely away from the library, or turn the research experience into an empty exercise, grudgingly performed and quickly forgotten.

Finally, there is the overriding force of bureaucratic inertia which stifles the creativity of classroom faculty member and librarian alike. On those campuses where non-credit classroom-based bibliographic instruction is mandatory (e.g., one or two required library sessions in the Freshman Composition course), such requirements were undoubtedly negotiated years ago, and the channels of communication between the two sponsoring departments on a program level may have clogged over time. In the

interim, the emphasis of instruction in the course in question may have shifted without the library's knowledge, and the old library instruction session may no longer be relevant from the content instructor's point of view. On the other side, after years of working with an unchanging course assignment, the library may envision a more effective design for the research assignment. While it is true that individual librarians and departmental faculty find it easy to negotiate such changes for specific class sections, it is generally not the custom for the two sponsoring departments to review and refine a mandatory bibliographic instruction component within the context of a given course once it has been established.

On the other hand, the considerably smaller number of academic libraries which have taken the credit-bearing route to the development of a library instruction program have also encountered problems in reaching the non-traditional student. While the credit-bearing activity guarantees the library's authority in the design of its own instructional program, and also offers the library an opportunity to improve its librarian to student ratio through funds generated by course enrollment, there is an inherent problem of isolation associated with this approach. Unless the course is a graduation requirement or an acceptable elective within a major sequence, it will never reach its intended audience because non-traditional students are supremely conscious of their progress toward the degree, and assiduously avoid any course which they perceive as an empty,

unrestricted elective. In this scenario, no amount of pre-registration promotion will secure the required enrollment for the course, and a pattern of course cancellations begins to emerge. Once students -- even those individuals who want to take the course because they recognize an advantage to the acquisition of library research skills -- perceive this cancellation pattern, they will not risk enrolling in the course when it is listed out of fear that the course will be cancelled (since it usually is) and they will be closed out of another course in which they are interested.

In a recent study of the success of developmental studies programs, it was noted that the structure and content of instructional designs in remedial subjects was not a major factor in student success; rather, the determinant of student success was the fact that these programs are constantly being revised and changed, with the least successful programs being those which have been least reviewed. In view of these findings and the limitations of both approaches to the design and delivery of a library instruction program which have evolved to date, the pattern of bibliographic instruction in academic libraries has remained static for too long. It is time to re-assess the teaching efforts of the academic library, and design a new library instruction curriculum which takes into account not only the characteristics of non-traditional students, but their library behavior as well, and builds research skills in an incremental fashion -- establishing comfort levels, not pressure points, as they attempt to master the use of the academic

library. It might accommodate both credit and non-credit offerings, but it should be predicated on the tenet that library skills are basic skills which are most effectively taught and reinforced across the curriculum.

Further, the new instructional design should be conceived along the practical distinctions which are used in the teaching of athletic skills -- i.e., establishing minimum competencies or fitness skills at developmental levels (such that basic library survival techniques are mastered early and become part of the non-traditional student's set of operational skills regardless of whether he stops out, drops out, or graduates), and advanced level, competitive information retrieval skills for those who aim to complete their degrees and establish careers in the information marketplace. In drafting this new blueprint for library instruction, the critical factor of defining the relationship between library faculty members and their classroom colleagues must be addressed in a new fashion. Through the traditional structure of the library committee, or by creating a new library instruction advisory body, or opening a discussion at the campus curriculum committee, a comprehensive library instruction plan can be designed that will demolish the confrontational relationship which non-traditional students have been driven to establish with the library. Inherent in this new initiative is the concept of a faculty development program which provides teams of library and classroom faculty with the opportunity (possibly through a creatively conceived released

time arrangement) to re-define their relationship such that the classroom faculty member retains authority over the content learning but the librarian is admitted more directly as a partner in the instructional design of research assignments.

For example, a recently submitted proposal to improve student retention in the Accounting/Managerial Studies Deaprtment at LaGuardia Community College (CUNY) requested that two faculty members (one from the Library and one from the Managerial Studies program) receive released time to review the syllabi for all courses required in the Managerial Studies concentration. For each course, the partners were to identify a required set of library competencies specific to the subject matter, and develop a set of library related assignments for Managerial Studies faculty to use in each required course. The program was intended to enable students to consistently develop and apply research skills which would help them progress smoothly and efficiently within the discipline; to create an opportunity for librarians and Managerial Studies faculty to work more closely together toward the improvement of both the collection and the curriculum; to enable the Managerial Studies program to easily communicate its research standards within the context of the campus library collection to a growing number of adjunct faculty in the department, and, finally, to test a new model for faculty-library interaction on the campus.

An assessment of the librarian/student ratio, and a careful analysis of the best use of the limited resources of the library

instruction staff are key elements of the proposal for library instruction across the curriculum. In the new model, once the classroom faculty and the library faculty have clearly defined library research competencies for the basic skills "fitness" level and within each major curriculum, decisions about the placement of the librarian in the classroom can be made. Strategically speaking, it would be best to place the library faculty member in the classroom where his presence is most critical -- at the two extremes of the curriculum (i.e., the earliest "fitness" level where the developmental studies student is literally oriented to the logic of library organization, and the advanced "competitive skills" level where the student might be taught how to conduct a bibliographic database search) -- while the classroom faculty member handles the integration of library competencies in the usual course of instruction as it is defined by the research priorities and patterns of the discipline.

In attempting to implement such a program, there can be no doubt that the most essential component to be developed is the fitness level of library skills for non-traditional students. It is at this level that library skills will prove to be a factor in improved student retention, and it is at this level that the student himself is closest to his support network on campus. In order to reach these students, academic libraries need to study the program structures which serve them -- the counseling components, the English as a Second Language departments, the

remedial reading and writing programs -- and make the initial breakthrough in the programs where student self-image is bolstered and the course of their academic success is charted.

Instruction at this fitness level must be defined not only in terms of teaching the basic logic of library use and research strategy; it must be defined in terms of intellectual access to the collection. For example, a careful examination of the library's materials selection policy might reveal that the library collects only materials in foreign languages taught on campus. If the curriculum is limited to the teaching of romance langauges, how can Japanese, Korean, Greek or Chinese students in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program experience an early library success by finding a major newspaper or magazine in their native language or from their homeland? Furthermore, since collection development priorities of traditional academic libraries are research-oriented, remedial students (whether they are native speakers of English or ESL students), may be thwarted in their earliest attempts to use the academic library for their remedial studies assignments because they cannot sift through the complexities of the research collection. Where developmental studies programs exist on campus, library collection development priorities must be assigned to them in order to provide non-traditional students with access to information in a format which is compatible with their developing skills and divergent learning styles (typically, this implies the development of a mini-collection of "high [interest]-low [vocabulary]" reading

materials and non-print programs). Where there are ESL programs on campus, the library collection should include the best available translations of the native folklore and literature of the students enrolled in these programs as a means of welcoming them to the learning environment while providing them with familiar constructs and contexts in which to practice their newly acquired language skills.

Once a specialized collection has been developed for the use of high risk students enrolled in a required sequence of remedial courses, new finding tools should be designed which will enable these students to successfully locate materials targeted at their course assignments without having to wade through the main catalog, and becoming intimidated by the entire range of sophisticated resources in the collection. One possiblity might be the creation of a teaching catalog -- a subset or extract of the library's main catalog -- which would lead remedial students to appropriate materials. In the proper context, such a teaching catalog would be analogous to the existence of the undergraduate library in a university library system -- it would lead the non-traditional student to effective use of the library's research collection, yet insure that his initial library experience would neither intimidate nor overwhelm him, and it would provide a bridge to the larger collection at a point of need which would be more correctly described as a point of readiness. Having established such a program, it is imperative that the academic library measure and report results in terms of the effect of the program on student success.

Clearly, the design for a program of library skills across the curriculum which has been offered here is only one approach to the problem of the reformation of bibliographic instruction as it has evolved for non-traditional students in most academic libraries. It, and all of the other programs which will be proposed and piloted in the future, will work only on one condition -- i.e., the re-definition of "point of need" library instruction as it relates to the non-traditional college student population. There can be no doubt that the non-traditional college student's point of need for library skills is not a singular locus in his academic career; it is a linear progression which originates with his admission to college and extends through the course of his formal higher education.

RE-AFFIRMING THE POWER-BASE

At the outset, it was suggested that Malcolm X's deeply felt appreciation of the role of libraries in his life might be a standard for determining the impact of academic libraries on the lives of non-traditional college students. On reflection, it is not only academic libraries which should be judged against this standard, since these libraries are merely creatures of the campus which they serve. At the heart of the relationship between the non-traditional college student and the academic library is the question of whether the library still constitutes the center of the college's curriculum.

Over the past few decades, the academic library and its relatively quiet evolution within the broader context of the Information Age has been overshadowed on the higher education scene by concerns over shrinking budgets, growing student needs, changing modes of instruction, shifting curricular emphases, and a host of other important issues. Currently, the major challenge to the instructional resourcefulness of any post-secondary institution is the growing problem of student retention. A palpable, measureable piece of the solution to this problem is a campus-wide program of clearly defined information retrieval skills which are incrementally acquired over the course of a student's career, and which clearly re-affirm the "new" academic library as the staple of the teaching/learning process as it relates to "new students," indeed, to all students. The result of such an information skills curriculum will be a more independent, more academically capable student, who will presumably be able to engage more readily in the dialogue of learning with the faculty. While it is improbable that information retrieval skills alone will stem the tide of student attrition, there is every reason to anticipate that a newly designed program of library or information retrieval skills across the curriculum will contribute to the success of some students.

In the context of the national movement to return to basic educational values, and in light of the potential for empowering students to complete their degrees and broaden their

participation in the learning process, it is clear that academic libraries -- the new, technologically advanced teaching libraries that have been developing over the last decades -- have a considerable contribution to make. It only remains for the libraries to be empowered within the context of their respective institutions to participate more fully in the instructional process.

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